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SUBJECT: TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION PROPOSED FOR MALDIVES

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Maldivian media reported December 18 that a South African-style Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had been proposed following President Mohamed Nasheed's radio address last week, where he called on the Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) to look into past injustices and become a "commission that properly works for human rights in this country." The proposal has drawn mixed reactions, with supporters stating that such a commission would promote forgiveness and reconciliation, and critics suspecting that it would be used as a political tool and set a precedent for a witch hunt. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) In an interview with local media, HRCM President Ahmed Saleem suggested the establishment of a separate commission "to look into the past with the intention to unify rather than punish." Saleem stated that HRCM's mandate was to send matters to the courts and it rarely investigated cases that occurred before 2000.

¶3. (U) The South African TRC was established in South Africa after the abolition of apartheid. Its mandate was to bear witness to, record, and in some cases grant civil and criminal amnesty to the perpetrators of crimes in exchange for truthful testimonies. It was regarded by many as invaluable to South Africa's transition to a full and free democracy. A similar commission in Maldives would require the approval of parliament.

¶4. (U) The main opposition party, Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP), announced it opposed the concept and stated that such a commission would only be used by the new government as an opportunity to pass on the blame for its failings to the previous regime.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: President Nasheed's recent call for investigations into past injustices appears to be a departure from past statements that he would not bring charges against his predecessor. Some believe that this change of heart is due to intense pressure from those who suffered under the previous government. Some already foresee challenges in achieving political and social consensus around the unfamiliar concept of a TRC, as serving justice is usually equated with arrest and imprisonment rather than forgiveness and reconciliation. Its mandate would have to be carefully explained to victims of injustices to ensure they are not misled or given false expectations on the possible outcome of the investigations. Although the South African TRC was generally thought of as successful, Ilham Mohamed of Transparency Maldives stated that the model might not have the same results in the Maldives, as the country lacks a well-regarded, unifying spiritual leader to parallel the role of South Africa's Desmond Tutu in the TRC process. Mohamed, nevertheless, stated that Maldivians would

likely welcome an acknowledgement of past wrongs to advance the cause of reconciliation. END COMMENT.

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